FEBRUARY 1988

Equity Matters

University of Toronto

Status of Women Office / Office of the President

Gwendolyn MacEwen

Members of the Canadian literary community paid tribute to the late Gwendolyn MacEwen in a memorial celebration at the St. Lawrence Centre on January 20. MacEwen, 46, left behind a great many friends. Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, Timothy Findley, bpNichol, P. K. Page, Michael Ondaatje and Phyllis Webb, among many others, gathered to mark the passing of a great woman. Even Margaret Avison came out of her accustomed seclusion to read from MacEwen's poetry — a sign of the loyalty and good will this poet generated among her peers while she lived.

In the course of her foreshortened career, Gwendolyn MacEwen published 20 works — including novels, children's books, travel works and plays — and established herself as one of Canada's finest poets. She won a Governor-General's award in 1969 for *The Shadow Maker*, and her last book, *Afterworlds*, has been nominated for the 1987 award.

She will be remembered for her many distinctive personal qualities: her skill as a reader of poetry, her sharp sense of humour, her visionary mysticism, her uncanny ability to imagine her way into the minds of historical figures — T. E. Lawrence, for example, and Franklin and Rasmussen.

The intensity of her perception of the world is always striking but seems to have troubled her at times. In "Red Curtains," a poem from *Afterworlds,* her sensitivity seems to be a burden: "If only something could be boring/For once; if only everything weren't so keen/All the time."

No profusion of fulsome praise for MacEwen's formidable poetic skill can mask the fact that she spent much of her adult existence in poverty. To pursue life as a woman and a poet is not a viable economic proposition. (The average Canadian writer earns $5,000-8,000 a year from published work. For life.)

During the best times, MacEwen

SCOTT DOUGLAS CLARKE FANSHAWE COLLEGE

managed to supplement her earnings from publication from Canada Council grants and stints as writer-in-residence at The University of Western Ontario and the University of Toronto. She was at U of T only last year and, it is said, immensely enjoyed meeting with students. Her readings on campus during this period included a highly entertaining one at Hart House in November 1986 at the invitation of the Status of Women Officer and her Advisory Committee.

She married twice, to poet Milton Acorn and to singer Nikos Tsingos, but lived alone for many years in a small apartment on Robert Street.

Despite periods of alienation and despair, MacEwen never saw the sadness of the world without also seeing its beauty. So let the poet herself cheer us. These closing words are from" Late Song," another poem from *Afterworlds*: "nothing ends until we want it to./Look, in shattered midnights,/On black ice under silver trees, we are still dancing, dancing./ Meet me in an hour at the limits of the city."

C.B.

Career Centre's Women of Achievement March 3

Today's women are aspiring professionals in a wide variety of fields and in many "non-traditional" roles. These women are not dreaming of such careers - they are achieving them. The role-models of the 80's are self-assured, determined, ambitious women, many of them pioneers in their fields.

A Conference on Women of Achievement - Past, Present, and Future will be held on Thursday, March 3, 1988, at Hart House.

Sessions focussing on women in science, in arts/media, in the public sector, and in business will run from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Judge Rosalie Abella will speak at lunch time, and Doris Anderson and Kay Sigurjonsson will be panellists in the evening. Other scheduled speakers include Joyce Bailey, Donna Baptist, Ellen Campbell, Kathleen Christie, Rose Marie Harrop, Helen Hogg, Tamara Johnson, Sandra Kybartas, Joan Marshman, Rose Sheinin, Zane Stait-Gardner, Judy Steed, and Helga Stephenson.

A reception from 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. with light refreshments will precede the keynote evening session.

The conference is free, and everyone is welcome. Plan to attend. For further information, please call 978-8000/8010.

Status Quote

"Manhood, not scholarship, is the aim of education."

(Sign in the Sandford Fleming Building cafeteria in November. Women students comprise 53% of the total 1987 winter session enrolment, including 362 in Applied Science and Engineering.)

Profile of Sex Ratio by Salary Grade/Range
Non-Unionized Administrative Full-time Staff Salary Data
Effective July 1, 1987

(Comparable percentages as of July 1, 1986, are shown in parentheses.)

Salary Grade/Range		# of Women	Total	Women as % of Total	
02N	$14,870 - 20,130	31	36	86.11%	(80.00%)
03N	16,190 - 21,910	108	139	77.70%	(78.62%)
04N	17,670 - 23,910	373	424	87.97%	(88.22%)
05N	19,270 - 26,070	380	434	87.56%	(87.38%)
01B	20,310 - 27,470	1	11	9.09%	(7.69%)
06N	21,330 - 28,870	531	660	80.45%	(81.33%)
02B	22,350 - 30,250	12	23	52.17%	(45.45%)
07N	23,440 - 31,720	182	297	61.28%	(61.40%)
03B	24,730 - 33,470	35	95	36.84%	(35.48%)
08N	25,970 - 35,130	28	116	24.14%	(22.88%)
04B	27,430 - 37,110	165	234	70.51%	(68.18%)
09N	28,790 - 38,950	73	161	45.34%	(39.87%)
05B	30,420 - 41,160	15	38	39.47%	(45.16%)
10N	31,990 - 43,290	24	98	24.49%	(25.00%)
06B	33,730 - 45,630	66	123	53.66%	(54.33%)
11N	35,500 - 48,020	3	44	6.82%	(6.38%)
07B	37,460 - 50,680	42	73	57.53%	(56.52%)
12N	39,430 - 53,350	6	53	11.32%	(4.17%)
08B	41,670 - 56,370	17	61	27.87%	(23.73%)
	Sub-Total	2092	3120	67.05%	(66.87%)
01S-06S	$42,370 - 96,880	28	110	25.45%	(19.53%)
	Total	2120	3230	65.63%	(65.04%)

NOTES

1. The data do not include Assistant Vice-Presidents and above. (As of January 1, 1988 three of six Assistant Vice-Presidents, and one of four Vice-Presidents, were women.)

2. Salary grades 02N, 03N, 04N, 05N, 06N and 04B include the following occupations: administrative assistant, clerk, clerk-typist, laboratory assistant, laboratory technician, secretary.

Source: Occupation Report, September 1987
Human Resources Department

More Talk About Talk

In the winter of 1986, York University became part of a burgeoning trend. The secretary of the university announced, somewhat ponderously, that "The Senate, the Board of Governors, and the President have joined together in declaring that gender-biased language and language which stereotypes individuals or groups is not an acceptable form of communication at York University."

These are strong words. But they articulate a growing awareness among Canadian institutions that language which betrays discriminatory attitudes should not be cultivated.

York integrated its policy on language into the "Style Guide" that now governs university communications. Similar publications produced by other institutions address the fact that, as a matter of tradition, women bear the brunt of linguistic discrimination. Ryerson, Carleton, and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, to name but a few, have established guidelines for avoiding sexist language.

The problem is that language, as we know and use it, is biased in favour of men. It forces women into the margins. Consider the state of English. In the course of everyday speech, our 'mother' tongue foists sexual bias and sexual stereotypes upon us — even when we intend to speak fairly and accurately.

A prosaic example will illustrate the point. "A careful student consults his teacher regularly." The pronoun — "his" — is a problem here. (In fact, it's a problem almost everywhere.) Call the accused a generic male pronoun: a mere monosyllable of specific gender used to describe a phenomenon that is not "gender-specific." ►

"The man we need must have guts, daring and initiative. Are you that man, Ms Jones?"

(Courtesy Cananda Wide Syndicate)

Since students are not exclusively male, it is conceivable that a student will sometimes consult her teacher. (At U of T 53 per cent of the students are women.) The use of one small and seemingly innocent pronoun ever so subtly promotes an inaccurate conception of the place of women in society: "Most students are men; therefore say 'his'." But is all this fuss really necessary? Everyone knows that the author of the culprit sentence intends "his" to signify "his or her." She's there; you just can't see her. "When I speak of laymen...I am talking about everyone."

Not so fast. Those who feel tempted to dismiss this painstaking concern for the subtleties of English usage would do well to ponder the claims made for language by a certain intellectual heavyweight.

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst (but no feminist) who rewrote Freud in terms of language, suggests that a developing individual can only enter into society by acquiring language. Society is itself a symbolic order, a kind of language. Anyone who fails to learn the common discourse is considered 'sick'. In short, the language that constructs our world also constructs us. It is the context in which such things as meaning, thought and action are possible.

Yet language, alas, never tells the whole story. It is couched in ideology, and ideology works by leaving things out, creating gaps, smoothing over contradictions. As a vehicle for ideology, language helps to maintain the ongoing health of the average society. At times, however, language serves one group in society more than any other group. This is where things get interesting.

One might argue that the history of the English-speaking world is a history of patriarchal domination, of women subordinated to men. One might also argue that patriarchal ideology, expressed in what we presently call "sexist" language, has always been an instrument of domination.

Sexist language tends to cast women in roles which support the position of men in society. "Scientists become so absorbed in their work, they tend to neglect their wives and children." John is out discovering the meaning of life, while Jane takes care of the kids.

Sexist language also tends to omit women, to erase them, banishing them to the gaps and margins. Words like "layman" and "mankind," and sentences like "The manager met with his staff" render women invisible. 'She's there but...' Women are the disappeared in language.

However, since they refuse to disappear from society, women are gaining a place for themselves in discourse. When ►

Women's Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

It's Leap Year

Sadie Hawkins and her sisters in
Women's Studies
invite you to come and celebrate
and have a drink on us

Friday, February 26, 1988
4 pm to 6 pm
Ivey Library, 20 Willcocks St.

25 YEARS
NEW COLLEGE

women first entered the business world to become 'businessmen,' our language embarrassed itself, showing its bias. The traditional absence of women from certain sectors of society was reflected by a gap, an absence, in language. Only recently did we see the need for a word to signify a female 'businessman.' When women began to close a gap in society, we had to fill in the linguistic gap and came up with such terms as "businessperson" and "business executive."

But entering a male-dominated world, and forging a place in a male-dominated discourse, requires an unusual personal initiative. Women cannot have a truly legitimate and truly equal role in society until they are allowed into language, until they can always be spoken of, and therefore thought of, on equal terms with men.

Language conditions thought; indeed ►

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it makes thought possible. Advisors to the University of Adelaide note that, unless women can begin to think of themselves playing new roles in society, they will contort themselves into old ones: "sexism can lead to personality distortion, misused talent and conformity." Such contortions begin in the class-room.

What can be done? Women can be given full status in language through the conscious erasure of bias and stereotypes from everyday usage.

The use of parallel pronouns ("A careful student consults his or her teacher regularly.") puts women and men on an equal footing. Avoiding pronouns altogether ("A careful student consults the teacher regularly.") ensures that one sex is not erased in favour of another. ►

WOMEN'S NETWORK
Panel Discussion

Women students returning to higher education

Representatives of
Woodsworth College
and the Transitional Year Program

Tuesday, March 8, 1988
12:00 noon
Croft Chapter House
University College

If we begin to speak of women entering male-dominated professions, we can imagine an end to the psychic contortions brought about by sexism. "Scientists become so absorbed in their work, they tend to neglect their families."

Reverse discrimination is no help, and we should remain sensitive to <u>all</u> kinds of bias and stereotyping. Bonus points go to readers who have noticed that generalizations about scientists create professional stereotypes.

Language exists in a state of flux. It is always changing in response to new developments in society. Necessary changes — which reflect social evolution — can be hastened through education. It is therefore encouraging when an educational institution takes the initiative and produces a guide for avoiding sexist language in institutional communications.

Carleton has one. Ryerson has one. York has one.

U of T has promised to "Monitor university documents and other official communications to ensure that they are free of discriminatory language, and sex-role and other stereotyping."

But this laudable initiative against sexism lies buried within a sub-section of the University's Employment Equity Policy.

Surely such an important and timely problem as linguistic discrimination deserves its own place in the legislative spotlight — and perhaps a few clear and concise guidelines to ensure the monitoring of official communications proceeds apace? C.B.

READING

Gloria Naylor

Author of
Women of Brewster Place
and
Linden Hills

will read from her latest work

Friday, March 11, 1988
8:00 p.m.
Wilson Lounge, New College

Equity Matters

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